

subordinated their personal ambitions to the good of the state and took the advice of the Senate rather than try to play a lone hand. In fact, the experienced senators took upon themselves the management of the government, for the assembly was usually too large for effective debate and quick action, and the consuls held office for too short a time to become the controlling power. The Senate was a patrician stronghold to which, for a very long period, almost none except a member of the old first families ever was appointed. In fact

509BC - 494BC

## ROMAN GOVERNMENT

The revolution made no extraordinarily violent changes in government, except that to take the place of the king two elected magistrates called Consuls were set up. They were to command the army and wield executive, financial, and judicial power at home. Outside the city the consul's power was absolute - he could have any citizen seized or executed at his will. Such authority was almost regal, but it was to be held for only one year. Each consul was, moreover, subject to the absolute veto power of the other. The

first consuls chose 300 distinguished elders to be senators for life. In the following years the consuls were usually senators, and returned to the Senate when they retired from office. Under the consuls were two quaestors to look after the state treasury. Since the CENTURIATE ASSEMBLY was under the control of the wealthy citizens who had doubtless carried out the revolution, it was retained. The Senate, the advisory council of elders, continued to meet. Its power and influence were even increased as a check on the consuls and on any radical tendencies that might appear in the assembly, though the latter might be expected to be quite safely conservative.

Doubtless it was fear of the reestablishment of the monarchy that dictated the creation of 2 consuls instead of one. It was quite remarkable that this system did not lead to more deadlocks. There were times of special need when a dictator was set up to serve for 6 months in place of the two consuls, but such occasions were rare. Roman consuls usually cooperated with each other remarkably well. Furthermore, they

The poorer landholders found the burden of  
 making over a growing heavy mortgage every  
 year. It kept them away from the cultivation of their  
 lands, and the property lay (infructuous) waste  
 for many years. The farmers found it  
 difficult to find - the debt must be paid or the  
 even be used and sold with misery. Popular  
 discontent grew and had in 1812 in the  
 of the tyrants. In the first 150 yrs. of the  
 common republic there were 3 successful  
 attempts to set up a tyranny and no relief

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the magistrates and the priesthood as well as the  
 laws were carefully monopolized by the patricians.  
 It will now be our task to trace the development  
 of the Roman system of government through the  
 first three centuries of the republic, following the  
 main line of development: (1) the creation of new  
 officials and governmental machinery to do the in-  
 creased work as the Roman state expanded, and  
 (2) the steps by which the plebeians gradually  
 secured equality with the patricians in the

management of the Roman state and so paved the way for more democratic government.

The patricians had numerous persons called clients among the lower classes of the people who were indebted to them for legal and economic help and so were expected to back them in politics. The former were fully established in control of most of the institutions of government and were determined to keep their monopoly. But as time went on, there was an increasing number of plebeian families that prospered and insistently demanded their share in government to which their wealth and intelligence fully entitled them. They supplied the leadership for a large, less articulate mass of common people who resented the domination of the old noble families. Rome was at war nearly every year for many centuries, and the plebeians were called on to share the dangers and losses of war along with the patricians whose numbers were far from great enough to fill the ranks of the army. In fact, it is probable that from an early date there were many plebeians in the eighty centuries of heavy armed infantry.

471 B.C. and the assembly of the tribes that elected them was given the right to vote demands for laws that must be referred to the Senate and the centuriate assembly. In this tribal assembly each tribe had one vote, but the size of the tribes was at first about the same and so no man's vote counted for more than another's. In later times, however, some tribes became much larger than others and great inequality rose.

Another grievance of the plebeians was that the patrician consuls interpreted the constitution

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the common people. Fortunately for the continuity of the Roman government, the ruling class had level heads and good common sense - when the plebeian demands became so strong that revolution was likely, they made enough concessions to prevent it. The old conservative structure of Roman government was continued with a series of modifications.

As we have said, the primary source of information about early Roman history was

very scanty, and the details about several of these steps are given us mainly by tradition. One tradition is that in 494 B.C. after the summer campaign was over, the plebeians in the army, tired of the severities of the patrician magistrates toward debtors and demanding protection, refused to return to Rome and marched over <sup>to</sup> the Sacred Mount to found a new city of their own. They elected two officers, called tribunes of the people, and under their leadership secured definite concessions and were persuaded to return to Rome. These new officials, who were retained by the plebeians, were elected every year by the assembly of the tribes (or wards) - the plebeian assembly. Their duty was to protect plebeians from arbitrary arrest and punishment, and to be subject to call at any time. Their powers were to be inviolate, but their veto power was limited to the city. Thus protected, the plebeians returned to Rome. Another tradition was that four tribunes of the plebs were set up in

it soon came to be the most common law-making body. Its resolutions presented by the tribunes became law with the Senate's approval. These were called plebiscits.

The Twelve Tables were adapted and put up in the Forum for everyone to read; in later generations, Roman boys were expected to memorize them by heart. The laws contained some new features, but for the most part they merely embodied old customs. They allowed enslavement for debts and permitted an injured man to retaliate in kind - the old principle of "eye for an eye and

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customary law to the advantage of their own class. Since no one but the patricians knew the law, that put the plebeians at a great disadvantage. Hence in 451 B.C. instead of the 2 consuls, a special commission of ten magistrates called decemvirs were set up for one year. They were empowered to codify the law and draw up ten tables or paragraphs of definite code. The next year decemvirs were again chosen and two more tables of law were prepared. Together these

laws constitute the Twelve Tables. But a better quarrel broke out - possibly the decemvirs planned to set up a tyranny. Modern experts disagree in accepting or rejecting parts of the old legends. One of the most famous traditions is that one of the decemvirs fell in love with a girl named Virginia and used his authority to adjudge her a runaway slave. In desperation her father stabbed her to death to save her. A great popular outbreak followed, in which the plebeian soldiers seceded, the decemvirs were forced out of power, and the consulship was restored. Another story is that the two new books of law were unjust and forbade legal marriage between patricians and plebeians. We know that this law was annulled a few years later (445 B.C.).

The treaty by which the breach between plebeians and patricians was ended increased the tribunes to ten in number and gave full legal recognition to their position and powers. The plebeian assembly was formally organized to include all the rural tribes as well as those in the city limits; and



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and a tooth for a tooth" still held good. But they did allow a man to bequeath property by will outside his family and they legalized a verbal bargain without transfer of property. There were very advanced for Romans of that age.

As long as there were any vivid distinctions between patricians and plebeians, the latter were dissatisfied. They demanded, in particular, admission to the consulship and (445 B.C.) gained an agreement that the work of the

consuls would be turned over to a commission of six consular tribunes, to which office plebeians were eligible. (The fact that the consular tribunes had to be elected by the Centuriate assembly, assured aristocratic control. Hence the advantage of having the consular tribunes was largely illusory.) Nevertheless, it was not until about 400 B.C. that a plebeian was chosen. The importance of the consuls was soon lessened when two censors were set up to do part of their work. These censors, chosen for five-year terms, made up the list of senators, assigned citizens to their proper classes in the army and assembly, and made government contracts.